Cibola National Forest Mountain Ranger Districts

Forest Plan Revision FAQs

What is a Forest Plan? A Forest plan provides a general, conceptual framework to guide a forest in managing its forest resources, goods, and services. Described as "the view from 30,000 feet," forest plans are intentionally strategic and broad in scope and provide guidance in the decision-making process involved with site-specific projects. New or revised forest plans have desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines, identification of suitability of areas for certain uses, and monitoring programs. Forest plans are consistent with and do not override law, regulation, or established policy.

Why does the Cibola's Forest Plan need to be revised? The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 requires that forest plans be periodically revised -- usually every 15 years. The Cibola is revising its 1985 Forest Plan (Land and Resource Management Plan) for the Sandia, Mountainair, Magdalena, and Mt. Taylor Ranger Districts.

Revisions to the Cibola's 1985 Forest Plan are overdue, and a lot has changed on the Forest and surrounding areas. Scientific understanding and technology have evolved; social and cultural influences and demands have changed; and stressors and threats to sustainability have increased. Some species have become rare and their persistence and viability are threatened. In addition, the guidance in the Forest Service's 2012 Planning Rule directs forest plans to be science-based and developed with extensive public involvement and collaboration throughout the revision process.

Where is the Cibola in the Forest Plan Revision process? The Cibola kicked off their revision effort in October 2012 and held public meetings the following month for the purpose of scoping for the Resource Assessment. The draft Assessment was released on April 14, 2014. This report assesses the ecological, social and economic conditions and trends and risks to sustainability of the resources, goods, and services provided by the Forest.

The Cibola scheduled a series of public meetings and collaborative sessions in May, June and July 2014 where staff discussed the draft assessment report, provided updates, and captured public input on the assessment and needs for change in the Cibola's management direction. The information gathered at public meetings, collaborative sessions and from electronic submittals and postal mail will help identify the areas in the 1985 Forest Plan that need to be changed.

How can the public be involved? The Cibola National Forest is committed to involving the public in a meaningful, substantive dialogue to help develop a forest plan that will result in sustainable management of its resources, goods and services for the next 15 years.

Members of the public may be involved throughout the planning process in a number of ways, including:

- Participating in public meetings or collaborative work sessions. These sessions will be announced through press releases and will be posted on the Cibola's forest plan revision web site: http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/cibola/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fsbdev3_065627
- Inviting one of the Cibola's Planning staff to make a presentation and answer questions at your organization's meeting. Contact Champe Green, Forest Planner, at 505.346.3889.
- Joining or hosting a self-convening workgroup for a specific topic, and bringing the group's ideas to a Cibola-hosted meeting or work session.
- Sharing your suggestions, comments and information by:
  - Sending an email with your comment to cibolamtnsplanrevision@fs.fed.us
  - Mailing it to Cibola National Forest Plan Revision, 2113 Osuna Road NE, Albuquerque, NM 87113.

Will plan direction in the Cibola's revised forest plan override the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, the 1872 Mining Law, or any other act passed by Congress pertinent to National Forest System lands? No, forest plan direction cannot conflict with any Congressional acts, nor can it be in conflict with existing Forest Service (FS) Manual directives, guiding agency regulation or policy. http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/

Why is the Cibola considering potentially suitable wilderness areas for designation now? The 2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule 36 CFR 219 §219.7(c)2(v) requires that, during forest plan revision, the Forest responsible official (Forest Supervisor) shall: identify and evaluate lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and determine whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation. The Cibola is currently undergoing plan revision, and must consider areas potentially suitable for wilderness.

What is wilderness? From the Wilderness Act of 1964 (PL 88-577 [16 U.S.C. 1131-1136])…"where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain…an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;…."

What are the steps of the required process of considering additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System? There are 4 steps or phases (see *FS Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 70*, http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5409886.pdf):

1. **The inventory phase** identifies all lands that may have wilderness characteristics and are:
   a. 5,000 acres or greater in size, or
   b. Contiguous to existing wilderness regardless of size, or
   c. Less than 5,000 acres, but of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation in an unimpaired condition.

   Areas that are excluded from the inventory phase map are those that have designated maintenance level 2, 3, 4, or 5 roads and areas with power lines with cleared rights of way, pipelines, and other permanently installed linear right of way structures. Public participation and input opportunities are required during this and the following phase.

2. **The evaluation phase** evaluates whether each area identified in the inventory phase has wilderness characteristics and generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of humans' work substantially unnoticeable and which offers opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.

3. During **the analysis phase**, the Forest Supervisor identifies which, if any, specific areas from the evaluation phase to carry forward for analysis in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as forest plan alternatives. The analysis will be made available for public review and comment as part of the draft EIS.

4. Finally, the Forest Supervisor will make a **decision on specific areas**, if any, to recommend for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, based on the analysis of the draft EIS and the input received from the public. If a preliminary administrative recommendation is made, it will ultimately be submitted to Congress for a decision on wilderness designation.

If an area is included in the inventory phase of lands potentially suitable for wilderness consideration but isn't recommended as an addition to wilderness, what happens to that area post-plan revision? That depends: if the area is an Inventoried Roadless Area ([IRA] – an area, typically 5,000 ac. or greater, which was identified in the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation in 1979), there are still regulations that limit some forest management options. That doesn't change. The area may also be considered for other special management in the plan revision process.

If the area is not an IRA, there is no residual impact from being in the inventory of potential additions to wilderness. However, the area may be considered for other special management in the plan revision process.

Inclusion in the inventory of potential additions to wilderness IS NOT a designation that conveys or requires a particular kind of management. An area that is identified in the inventory phase as potentially suitable for wilderness consideration might not be carried forward during the evaluation phase because of issues pertaining to naturalness, solitude or primitive unconfined recreation, lack of unique features or values, or ability of the Forest to manage the area to protect wilderness characteristics.

Can a mobility-impaired person use a wheelchair in a wilderness area? On National Forest System lands, persons using wheelchairs and other mobility devices may use them wherever foot travel is allowed, including wilderness areas. Wheelchairs and other mobility devices must be designed solely for use by a mobility-impaired person and are of the type that are commonly used in indoor, sometimes congested, pedestrian areas (e.g., indoor mall or court room).

Will I be able to hunt, trap, fish, camp, ski, hike, rock climb or use pack or saddle stock in an area recommended or designated as wilderness. Yes. Subject to the hunting, trapping, and fishing regulations of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, you may hunt, trap, or fish. Motorized or mechanized transport equipment such as game carts, wagons, snowmobiles, or mountain bikes is not allowed. See *FS Manual 2300, Recreation, Wilderness, and Related Resource Management – Chapter 2320 – Wilderness Management* for further detail. http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/

Is mineral exploration or mining of locatable (hard-rock minerals) permitted in areas designated as wilderness? Yes, but only if valid existing rights (VER) were established as of the date of the wilderness withdrawal and the claims are still valid as of the date of any subsequent validity examination. In order to operate, an approved plan of operations is required which contains reasonable mitigation measures to protect forest surface resources and is consistent with the rights of the claimant. Wilderness is closed to the removal of common variety minerals such as sand, gravel, stone, or similar materials, and is not subject to the operation of the mineral laws for ***leasable (oil or gas) minerals.,*** See *Forest Service Manual 2300, Recreation, Wilderness, and Related Resource Management – Chapter 2320 – Wilderness Management* for further detail. http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/

Are metal detectors allowed in wilderness? Strictly speaking, no, unless operated on claims determined to have a VER. Metal detectors are mechanized equipment, which is not otherwise allowed in wilderness. If minerals are found, it would not be allowable to remove them from the wilderness, unless you are on a claim determined to have a VER, you are the owner of the claim, and you are under an operating plan if one is required.

How are operations affected in a Recommended Wilderness Area? Operations may continue in recommended wilderness areas as for lands open to the location of mining claims. A VER determination is not required for mineral operation in *recommended* wilderness areas.

Can search and rescue operations be conducted in a recommended or designated wilderness? Yes. The Forest Supervisor can authorize the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport for emergencies where the situation involves an inescapable urgency and temporary need for speed beyond that available by primitive means. Categories include: fire suppression, health and safety, law enforcement involving serious crime or fugitive pursuit, removal of deceased persons, and aircraft accident investigations. See *FS Manual 2300, Recreation, Wilderness, and Related Resource Management – Chapter 2320 – Wilderness Management* for further detail. http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/

Is livestock grazing allowed in a recommended or designated wilderness? Yes, if grazing was established prior to designation of the area as wilderness. The number of livestock permitted in wilderness would remain at the approximate level existing at the time of designation. Maintenance of supporting facilities existing in the area prior to designation is permissible, and maintenance, as well as emergency situations, may be accomplished or remedied through the occasional or situational use of motorized equipment. Rule of reasonableness will govern use of motorized equipment. See *FS Manual 2300, Recreation, Wilderness, and Related Resource Management – Chapter 2320 – Wilderness Management* for further detail. http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/

How does recommendation or designation of wilderness areas affect fire management? Fire management objectives in wilderness are to:

1. Permit lightning caused fires to play, as nearly as possible, their natural ecological role within wilderness; and
2. Reduce, to an acceptable level, the risks and consequences of wildfire within wilderness or escaping from wilderness.

Two types of prescribed fires may be approved for use within wilderness:

1. Those ignited by lightning and allowed to burn under prescribed conditions, and
2. Those ignited by qualified FS officers.

No fire may be ignited or allowed to burn without documented, preplanned, specified conditions. The Forest Supervisor may approve the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport during emergency situations such as fire suppression. The Regional Forester shall approve the use of tractors in wilderness for fire suppression.

The Cibola National Forest has been partnering with local communities in the establishment and maintenance of wildland urban interface (WUI) areas adjacent to wilderness to minimize spread of wildfire ignited on wilderness to areas off-Forest.

If a privately-owned inholding becomes surrounded by recommended or designated wilderness, will the landowner be able to access the property? Yes. Per *36 Code of Federal Regulations 251 Subpart D*, landowners and their successors in interest who own land completely surrounded by wilderness are ensured adequate access for the reasonable use and enjoyment of their land. *FSM 2300, Chapter 2320, Section 2326.13* states that the Regional Forester may provide these landowners with written permission to use wilderness routes or motorized modes of travel not available to the general public.

How many IRAs exist on the Cibola mountain districts and what activities are allowed in them? The Mt. Taylor Ranger District has 5 IRAs, while the Magdalena Ranger District has 8. None occur on either the Sandia or Mountainair Ranger Districts.

Except as noted below, the Chief of the FS will review all projects involving road construction or reconstruction and the cutting, sale, or removal of timber in those areas identified in the set of inventoried roadless area maps contained in the FS Roadless Area Conservation, Final Environmental Impact Statement Volume 2 dated November 2000.

Regional Foresters will review the following activities:

a. Any necessary timber cutting or removal or any road construction or road reconstruction in emergency situations involving wildfire suppression, search and rescue operations, or other imminent threats to public health and safety in IRAs.
b. Timber cutting, sale, or removal in IRAs incidental to the implementation of an existing special use authorization. Road construction or road reconstruction is not authorized through this re-delegation without further project specific review.
c. The cutting, sale, or removal of generally small diameter timber when needed for one of the following purposes:
    - To improve threatened, endangered, proposed, or sensitive species habitat;
    - To maintain or restore the characteristics of ecosystem composition and structure, such as to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire effects within the range of variability that would be expected to occur under natural disturbance regimes of the current climatic period; or,
    - For the administrative and personal use, as provided for in 36 CFR 223, where personal use includes activities such as Christmas tree and firewood cutting and where administrative use includes providing materials for activities such as construction of trails, footbridges, and fences.

Motorized equipment (such as chainsaws) ARE allowed in IRAs. Motorcycles or motorized vehicles 65 inches or less in width are allowed on designated motorized trails and roads, and mechanical transport (such as mountain bikes) is allowed on designated trails and designated roads.

Will the revised forest plan affect the current motor vehicle use map (MVUM) on a particular ranger district? Generally no, the travel management analyses, decisions, and resulting motor vehicle use maps for a ranger district will be supported by the revised forest plan. The revised plan will not alter those previous travel management decisions and MVUMs, with the exception that motorized trails within an area designated as wilderness or a research natural area as a result of recommendations made in the revised plan, could be closed and decommissioned.

Motor vehicle use maps are generally updated by the Forest either bi-or triennially. Updates are based on new, relevant information and circumstances. Modifications of authorized routes can be considered during public participation opportunities at those times.

The Cibola has asked the public for suggestions on the needs for change statements to the existing 1985 Cibola Forest Plan. What happens when you receive conflicting or opposing needs for change statements regarding management of a particular resource, good, or service? At this point in the plan revision process, opposing views are welcome. The planning team will review the statements received, determine if they are within established law, regulation, or policy and are within the scope of forest plan revision. If opposing viewpoints meet these criteria, then the needs for change statement simply would say that there is a need for change for the revised plan to provide direction on management of that particular resource, good or service

The Forest Supervisor would ultimately decide what plan direction would be supported by relevant best available science and local knowledge, would minimize risks to sustainability of the resources, goods, and services provided by the Cibola, and would support opportunities for social and economic contribution by the Forest to the affected communities.

What are special areas, are they being considered now, and who designates them? Certain limited areas of National Forest System lands not designated as wilderness and containing outstanding examples of plant and animal communities, geological features, scenic grandeur, or other special attributes merit special management. These areas are either designated by law or may be designated administratively as special areas. Areas so designated are managed to emphasize recreational and other specific related values. Other uses are permitted in the areas to the extent that these uses are in harmony with the purpose for which the area was designated.

Forest plan revision is the appropriate time to conduct an analysis of the need and desirability for special areas. These analyses include collaboration and input from the public, other government entities, and tribes. Other than those designated by law, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Regional Forester, or the Forest Supervisor can designate special areas on the Forest, depending on the size.

What are Research Natural Areas (RNAs)? They are areas set aside by the FS to preserve a representative sample of an ecological community, primarily for scientific and educational purposes. Commercial or general public use is either not allowed or discouraged. Non-manipulative research and monitoring activities are encouraged in RNAs and can be compared with manipulative studies conducted in other similar areas. RNAs are administratively designated by the Regional Forester. There is one designated RNA on the Cibola-the Bernalillo Watershed RNA. One other area, Little Water Canyon in the Zuni Mountains of Mt. Taylor RD, was proposed in the 1985 Forest Plan and will be re-evaluated during plan revision. Other areas put forth by either FS staff or the public may be considered as well during plan revision.

Tentative Schedule for Cibola Forest Plan Revision Activities

Dates	Activity
November 2012–April 2014 (Done)	Notified public of kickoff of forest plan revision of the 1985 Cibola Forest Plan for the 4 mountain ranger districts. Held public meetings in Albuquerque, Tijeras, Mountainair, Corona, Torreon, and Magdalena. Addressed meetings of Cibola and McKinley County Commissions at Gallup and Grants. Received input from the public on conditions, trends, and risks to resources, goods, and services provided by the Cibola NF. Prepared draft resource assessment.
April 14, 2014 (Done)	Released the draft resource assessment for review and comment.
May 12–21, 2014 (Done)	Held public meetings to discuss the draft resource assessment in Albuquerque, Grants, Magdalena, Socorro, Santa Fe, Tijeras, Torreon, and Mountainair.

Dates	Activity
May–June 2014 (Done)	Meeting with intertribal forums to discuss draft resource assessment.
June 9–July 8, 2014 (Done)	Two rounds of collaborative work sessions identified the needs for change to the existing forest plan. Meetings were held in Gallup, Grants, Socorro, Albuquerque, Mountainair, and Torreon.
August 2014–February 2015 (Done)	Processed public input on draft assessment report and preliminary needs for change statements, finalized, and published a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the *Federal Register*.
September–November 2014 (Done)	Began a collaborative process for identifying and inventorying potentially suitable lands for wilderness consideration. Introduced the online Collaborative Mapping Tool and held 1st round of meetings in Albuquerque, Mountainair, Socorro, and Grants, and presented at Cañon de Carnuel. Received public input on draft wilderness inventory.
December 2014–May 2015 (In progress)	Process public input on initial wilderness inventory maps and develop a 2nd phase of wilderness inventory maps for public review.
February–April 2015 (In progress)	Received public input on draft assessment report and preliminary needs for change statements and Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS. Will use input to develop draft forest plan and alternatives and draft EIS.
April 2015	Host a meeting of cooperating units of governments for purpose of organizing a collaborative process for developing forest plan alternatives and a Draft EIS. Albuquerque
May–August 2015	Begin collaboration on the development of desired conditions and other plan components for the revised plan; Co-convene with cooperators to form local landscape teams (Mt. Taylor, Magdalena, Mountainair, and Sandia). Coordination of public meetings and field trips (dates to be announced). Roll out web posting, news releases and public meetings to be coordinated with cooperating units of government for public review of 2nd phase wilderness inventory maps and 60-day comment period on evaluation of 2nd phase wilderness inventory polygons.
August–September 2015	Release of an initial draft plan including draft wilderness recommendations and alternatives. Roll out web posting, news releases and public meetings to be coordinated with cooperating agencies to provide further opportunity for public review and comment.
October 2015–Winter 2015	Review comments on draft forest plan, wilderness recommendations and alternatives and make adjustments. Prepare draft EIS to analyze effects of draft forest plan and alternatives.

Dates	Activity
Winter 2015–Summer 2016	Notice of Availability and public review of the proposed draft forest plan and Draft EIS alternatives (including wilderness recommendations) analyses, 90-day public comment period, and response to comments and adjustments.
Fall–Winter 2016	Final EIS, Draft Record of Decision, and Notice of Objection period.
Spring–Summer 2017	Notice of Plan approval and Final Record of Decision and EIS.
Summer 2017	Implementation and monitoring of the revised forest plan.

For more information about the 2012 Planning Rule and related topics go to:
http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/planningrule/faqs